

VZCZCXR08159
OO RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHH #0458/01 3381710
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 041710Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5310
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HELSINKI 000458

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AF](#) [FI](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: FINLAND TOPPING UP OMLT, EUPOL,
ANATF, BUT NOT CONSIDERING UPPING ITS COMMITMENTS

REF: A. HELSINKI 447
[B.](#) HELSINKI 441

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: President Obama's December 1 speech and the request for more support in Afghanistan from NATO Secretary General Rasmussen have triggered an extensive public discussion in Finland's political and media circles. There is a broad consensus behind the current level of commitment of resources and on the goal of helping Afghanistan's security forces take responsibility for their own country, but no indications that Finland is yet ready to make any major increase in troop or civilian commitments. The GOF is working to fill out its OMLT and EUPOL contingents to levels already set in the summer and is pointing to its doubling of support to the ANA trust fund, all of which it hopes are seen as indications that it is doing its part. END SUMMARY.

PUBLIC COMMENTS FOCUS ON INCREASED TRAINING

¶2. (U) Since the POTUS December 1 Afghanistan speech, the debate on whether Finland can provide additional support to Afghanistan has begun in earnest. Speaking to national broadcaster YLE on December 2, Foreign Minister Stubb suggested that Finland might be able to send about 15 additional trainers, though he pointed out the difficulties in recruiting them (Note: Finland has not yet filled some 15 of its OMLT positions, and MFA officials have previously mentioned the possibility of raising the number of Finns in EUPOL from 24 to 30. End Note). Also speaking to YLE on December 3, Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Pertti Salolainen (NCP) echoed both the idea of sending additional trainers (police and/or military) and the difficulties in recruiting them. When asked whether there should be a date for Finnish troops to start coming home since the U.S. was going to start withdrawing in July 2011, Salolainen explained that President Obama probably was influenced by the U.S. political calendar in setting this date and that he did not see a need for a specific date for a Finnish withdrawal.

NO SURPRISES IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

¶3. (SBU) On December 3 Parliament held a hastily scheduled plenary session focusing on Afghanistan (the last being only two months ago). Some 36 MPs from all parties as well as the Prime Minister, Foreign, Defense, Development, and Immigration ministers took part. FM Stubb delivered the government's opening statement in which he expressed Finland's support for President Karzai's goal of taking security responsibility within five years and echoed President Obama's reminder that the threat of extremism in Afghanistan and Pakistan is a threat to all nations. Stubb went on to emphasize that strengthening both ISAF and civilian crisis management was key, and that soldiers are necessary to protect the civilian presence. Noting the

requests of the NATO Secretary General and the U.S. for additional troops and trainers, Stubb closed by stating that Finland had doubled its civilian support in the last year, becoming the third largest participant in EUPOL with some 25 police trainers on the ground. Stubb declared that the GOF would not make any new commitments at the ISAF foreign ministerial he was attending the next day.

¶4. (SBU) Statements by governing party lawmakers were strongly supportive of Finland's participation in both military and civilian crisis management in Afghanistan, often focusing on the importance of building a just society there in which women's and children's rights were respected. Other supporting voices emphasized that a greater effort in training Afghan security forces would allow international forces to hand over security responsibility, some referring to the 2011 date mentioned in President Obama's speech. Opposition SDP Leader Jutta Urpilainen noted that Finland's policy was well-founded and should continue, especially with regard to police training, and area in which Finland was well-suited to provide help. Urpilainen and other opposition MPs then took the opportunity to grill the government over its recurring failure (in their view) to share information both within the government, with the President, and with parliament, about foreign and security policy. The PM responded by denying that there was any systemic problem. (NOTE: The government has provided ample ammunition for these rhetorical attacks. Earlier this week the PM publicly stated that he first heard about the NATO SYG request for more support in the press while in October both the President and Foreign Minister misstated the departure time frame for Finnish Election Support Forces in Afghanistan. In September

HELSINKI 00000458 002 OF 002

the PM claimed that he heard about the Security Police (SUPO) plan to post personnel abroad from the press. END NOTE.)

¶5. (SBU) Neither the government nor did any MPs suggest that Finland provide additional soldiers to ISAF, with several explicitly noting that no military solution was possible. There was a general consensus that, to the extent possible, Finland should put more emphasis on training Afghans. Recruiting trainers, however, was recognized as increasingly difficult due to the danger and lack of sufficient compensation or career incentives. Defense Minister Hakamies acknowledged the difficulty of recruiting trainers, but indicated that currently Kosovo posed a more difficult challenge in this regard than Afghanistan. Green Party MP Pekka Haavisto focused on the weak credibility of the Karzai government and called for a political process to include dialogue with unspecified opponents of the government. NOTE: In the past, including at the previous parliamentary plenary on Afghanistan in October, there was substantially more discussion of the need for political solutions including negotiation or dialogue with "moderate Taliban." In sharp contrast, Haavisto was the only speaker who addressed this issue in the December 3 debate. END NOTE.

GOF WORKING ON FILLING OMLT AND EUPOL SLOTS

¶6. (SBU) The ISAF team leader in MFA's Security Policy unit told poloff December 4 that for now the most likely tangible increases in support from the GOF would be completely filling those positions in its OMLT and within EUPOL which were currently vacant and increasing its contributions to the ANA trust fund. While the GOF had approved providing an OMLT of 30 personnel, only eight are currently on the ground. Finland will also try to increase its EUPOL complement from 24 to 30. Its contribution to the ANA trust fund will double this year to 600,000 euros and the same amount is committed for 2010.

EDITORIALS SKEPTICAL OF OBAMA STRATEGY

¶ 7. (U) Editorials in the aftermath of President Obama's December 1 speech largely focused on Obama's "ownership" of the war and the 2011 "deadline" for U.S. troops to begin withdrawing. Tabloid Aamulehti (circ. 139,165) opined that Afghanistan was "ever more clearly Obama's war, branding his entire presidency" while citing favorably Senator McCain's criticism of the 2011 pullout date. Daily Keskisuomalainen (circ. 75,000) asserted that "it is increasingly apparent that the fundamental problems, like the corruption of Afghanistan's tribal- and clan-based government . . . will not be solved by raising the number of troops." While stating that Finland must stay in Afghanistan, daily Kaleva (circ. 81,000) asserted that it was "not absolutely necessary" to increase Finnish contributions, which in any case would not be done "in accordance with a policy speech by the president of the United States."

MOST FINNS COMMITTED TO HELPING AFGHANISTAN

¶ 8. (U) The annual (conducted since 1964) government-sponsored Advisory Board for Defense Information (ABDI) poll of the Finnish public regarding attitudes towards national defense included a series of questions about Afghanistan for the first time. Carried out by Gallup in September and October 2009 and published December 4, the poll indicates that while 67 percent of Finns do not want to "pull out" of Afghanistan, over 70 percent felt that the international community had not been successful in its objectives of improving the status of women, combating terrorism, or creating democratic governance. Finnish participation in providing assistance to local government and in developing education and the local economy garnered over 80 percent support, while participation in activities to eliminate extremist groups using deadly force was supported by only 20 percent with 72 percent opposing such efforts.

ORECK